1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

Chapter X

The Earth, the Clan-God and the Village Mother

● 771 In the scanty literature dealing with Bastar, few things have received briefer attention than the religion of the Marias. Russell and Hiralal try in twenty-one pages (III, 97-118) to summarize the religion, magico-religious ideas and festivals of all the Gonds of the Central Provinces; their account, therefore, necessarily must be vague about the Marias, and on Bastar generally is in many respects misinformed; there is a tendency to prefer the picturesque to the unvarnished facts, as in the accounts of the alleged human sacrifices at Dantewara and of *Doctor Deo*. I have already stated that there has never been the slightest proof that the former ever took place, and pointed out that, if they did, they were semi-State Hindu ceremonies under the aegis of the Raja and the hereditary Rajput high-priest of his tutelary goddess Danteshwari. *Doctor Deo* is represented as a principal god of 'north Bastar'; actually the Mohammedan sub-assistant surgeon 'deified' as *Doctor Deo* died of cholera on the Keskal pass as he was returning to Raipur from Bastar, and his spirit has been attached by the surrounding Murias as a peon or servant to the shrine of Bhangaram at the head of the pass, where from generations past the final scene of disease-riddance or *bohorani* ceremonies among the Bhattras and Murias of Jagdalpur and Kondagaon tahsils and the adjacent Bastar Irredenta tracts of Jeypore had taken place; here the scapegoat from Jagdalpur is at last driven forth into the wilderness, and hundreds of litters or model *rath* chariots have been deposited in front of Bhangaram with scape-doves and the sweepings of houses visited by epidemics. *Doctor Deo's* cult is a later and very minor accretion of this ancient cult.

General: previous writers

776 618 Glasfurd in his Report correctly noted that, like the Jhoria and other surrounding Murias, the Marias of the Abujhmar hills had in several villages Log-gods which they called *pen* (plural, *penk*); but he did not realize that there was one of these *penk* for each clan. This was pointed out on page 42 of the *Gazetteer*, though the clans are spoken of there as 'tribes' or by the Hindu term *gotra*; the suggestion there made that the system of each clan in its own area worshipping its own *pen* was even then breaking down, was at least premature, considering that it is still in full force in the Antagarh

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
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Chanda Gonds, who reported definitely that in the Chanda Maria villages of Bidri, Yemla, Burgi, Uddera and Kandodi the Marias had one three-god, six four-god, eight five-god, eight six-god and eight seven-god clans. The difficulty is, of course, that the word 'Maria', as we have seen, is not a Gondi word and may cover more than one ethnic group, as in Bastar; there certainly are differences between the plains and Hill Marias of Chanda, and the point needs to be cleared by verification in definite hill villages in the Chanda portion of the Abujhmar hills. My enquiries from some of these villagers who visited my camps in Bastar along with Bastar relatives never produced any Chanda Maria who admitted belonging to a god-group or having Chuddur Penk in his house. Admittedly even in Nagpur District, Gonds are reluctant to show their Chuddur Penk, and Koitor everywhere have to be handled delicately before they will talk of the other domestic cult, that of the Departed. Nevertheless, I have known many Marias intimately, and have had them talking freely on these questions; and I have seen the contents of every pot, gourd, packet or other receptacle in many a Hill and Bison-horn Maria house: but I never found any domestic godling, and they have always denied having them, or god-groups founded on them. So likewise did adjacent Jhoria and Gotal Murias, though some of them knew of Gonds who had immigrated into Bastar from the Central Provinces with domestic godlings and god-groups. The only Bastar Gonds of whom it has ever been reported that they have domestic gods in addition to the clan-god are the 'Telugu Gonds' towards Konta (by which is probably meant the Dorla), stated on page 42 of the *Gazetteer* to have for each family a separate god represented by a few pieces of *tendu* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) wood; but the Dorla villages that I visited near Jaggergonda had no such family gods.

It may, therefore, be taken as certain that neither Hill nor Bison-horn Marias of Bastar have the cult of the Chuddur Penk, and that their clan-groups are not founded on them. If they are to be fitted into the traditional scheme of god-groups by persons who dislike exceptions to a rule apparently so universal among other Gonds, they must come in as the missing one-god group!

Much has been said in the preceding chapters, particularly the chapter on agriculture, on the cults of Bhum (the earth), the Clan-god and the Village Mother. In some sense, all three are the same, all Marias, Hill and Bison-horn, being the children of Bhum. They will tell you sometimes that the Pen clan-god and the Village Mother are also Bhum; and in some places the cairn or table-stone below the sacred *saja* tree does duty

General nature of Bastar Maria cult of Earth, Clan-god and Village Mother

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
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on one occasion for the Pen and on another for the Village Mother; even at the annual village festival of the Mother following the clan harvest-home and Koqsar of the Hill Marias the Pen, if honoured, is sometimes honoured on the same stones as the Mother, and not at a separate cairn. It is useless to expect to get any clear-cut distinction between the three conceptions out of a Maria, whose religious ideas are vague and inchoate. He knows only that there are factors which may bring trouble or which may benefit, and that the wise clan and village duly propitiate them, though, if in their turn these unknown factors fail to reciprocate, they will get no further meed of sacrifice for the same immediate object unless the desired benefit is at once granted. An example of this attitude has already been given in the mention in Chapter VII of the deputation that went to see the Gume clan's god to protest against rain preventing the firing of the *penda*, and to promise him a cock if and when he stopped the rain. In the actual formulae pronounced by the village *kasyeq-gaita* in the hills and the *perma* in the Bison-horn country at the sowing and other ceremonies, however, I have never heard the clan-god's name mentioned; they start almost invariably with '*Bhum kenji, Talugh kenji!*' 'Earth hearken, Mother hearken!', sometimes addressing similarly '*Nel*' or fields and '*Jimme Jaga*', all that is around. Here *Bhum* and the clan-god appear to be identical; in the villages where there are both a *kasyeq-gaita* and a *bhum-gaita* in the Abujhmar country, it is the latter who has to preside over the village deputations to the clan-god. The distinction, however, is not clear-cut. In most hill villages there is no separate *bhum-gaita*, and the *kasyeq-gaita* not only performs his work, but is sometimes called *bhum-gaita* or *bhumia*, while in Bison-horn villages the *perma* is *bhum-gaita* and addresses himself in some tracts to the Earth both as Bhu-deo and Bhu-devi, earth-god and earth-goddess, besides being the priest of the Village Mother and the other forms which the earth takes in Bison-horn cults, such as Dongar Deo or Kodo Deo. The *waddai* or *modul-waddai* I have referred to as the clan-priest, and it has been seen how in the Hill Maria clan-areas each village goes to him for the celebration of the clan festival and for obtaining the clan-god's permission to hold the village festival. But the clan-priest is generally not the clan headman even in the Abujhmar hills tracts where the clan-area has become the modern *pargana*. He may or may not be a person of ability and influence. He should be the medium, into whose body the clan-god enters and through whose mouth the god makes his will known to his clan. The secular *pargana* headman is a man of far more influence; and in the villages the *kasyeq-gaita* and the *perma* are religious headmen in a way that the clan-priest seldom is

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
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in the clan; often the same man is both religious headman and secular headman (*gaita*, *pedā*), and these functions were probably always combined before the growing interference of the State with village life and the excessive demands for forced labour and supplies began to make the secular headmanship a burden to be avoided by the true leader of the village and put on to the village simpleton.

The Village Mother is always dealt with in Hill and Bison-horn villages through the *kasyeṣ-gaita* and the *perma* respectively; but she neither enters into the body of a medium nor can be consulted through one like the clan-god. Though it be through her that the *kasyeṣ-gaita's* eggs are addled or other omens of ill or indications that the village should shift are sent, yet to make plain her will the medium of the clan-god, that is the clan-priest (the *waddai* or *modul-waddai*), is sent for, and through his mouth the clan-god expounds the will of the Unseen Powers. It is tempting to regard her as the personification of the female and the clan-god as that of the male element in the reproductive powers of the Earth or Bhum; needless to say, there are no Maria theologians to worry themselves over such distinctions, and it is not a clear-cut one, since some clans have a clan-goddess, not a god; e.g. Oghal Muttai, goddess of the Dhurwa clan, and Gumtuli, goddess of the Padali clan of Padalibhum at Adnar. This conception, nevertheless, does to a considerable extent clarify the fundamental relation between the Earth, the clan-god and the Village Mother. The other point to be remembered is that the clan-god is the Earth in its dealings with the clan, and the Mother the Earth in its dealings with the village. No woman or girl may take part in the festivals, public sacrificial meals, worship and intercession of either clan-god or Village Mother.

The Earth, then, as clan-god, is the god of nourishment and reproduction, and of life itself; the Marias are his children, fed by him. For them to raise their sustenance he divided up the land among the clans, and the clan-area among the villages, and in each clan and village he appointed priests or headmen who alone might communicate with him, and to whose first ancestor he revealed the clan and village boundaries, which knowledge has been handed down from father to son. The Maria leaves his *penda* slope for another after two or three years because the god is suffering from having too much nourishment extracted from that slope, but he will return to it when the god has recovered from his exhaustion. Children are but one of the god's crops.

The Clan-god

In form, we have seen, the clan-god of Marias of both kinds and of Murias, is a framework of three parallel *saja* logs held together by cross-pieces of bamboo or *saja*, to which they are lashed by cords of *siari* creeper or twisted

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
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CHAPTER SEVEN

MURIA RELIGION

I. Introductory

ALTHOUGH this book does not profess to be a study of Muria culture as a whole, it is necessary to give an outline of the religion of the tribe because the ghotul is itself a religious institution and has its share in the worship of the gods, while many of the chelik are already being trained as mediums and priests.

The ghotul is a *thirtha-sthān*, a holy place, as a Hinduized Muria explained to me; you cannot commit sin within its walls. It was founded by Lingo Pen, noblest of Gond cult-heroes, and no evil dream or power of witch or warlock can invade its sanctuary. Chelik and motiari undertake dancing expeditions in honour of the gods; they visit the great clan festivals and dance at them; at the New Eating ceremonies chelik are employed as cooks and motiari gather leaves for plates and cups. In the ceremonial hunts before certain festivals, the chelik play a major part, and they have special duties in connexion with the first ritual cutting of forest clearings. In some villages it is the chelik who roll the Gaita in mud at the Wijja Pandum and carry him home on their shoulders.

The ghotul also is itself the scene of occasional religious activities. In Palli-Barkot and neighbouring villages the blessed seed collected at harvest-time is hung up in the ghotul until it is needed for the first sowing. On the eve of many festivals the Kaser-Gaita sleeps in the ghotul to ensure chastity for himself and the chelik. Dassera and Diwali are observed by the ghotul members in their own way, and they keep other special festivals which I will describe in detail later when I return to a fuller discussion of the ghotul's part in the religious life of the tribe.

Muria religion is undoubtedly a religion of the Hindu family with special affinities to its Shaivite interpretation, yet at the same time it is but little 'Hinduized'. It remains a special and characteristic faith, a logical entity which can be described and recognized. It acknowledges a large number of deities whom it pictures in a simple and homely manner. It has a definite priesthood and a body of mediums who communicate with the gods while in a state of trance. It erects shrines and temples to the gods and builds small huts for the tendance and placation of the dead. It consecrates every rural activity by sacrifice and a sacramental meal. It purifies and protects the village by a series of ceremonies, and it directs its beneficial power against the energies of witch and warlock.

The subject is a large one, and I cannot hope to treat it fully here. But I will give a brief account of the Muria gods, the Muria priesthood and the shrines in which worship is performed. I will describe the customary methods of worship and sacrifice and consider the trance in which the gods make their wishes known. Certain phallic elements in the worship must also be described. I will then give a brief outline of the festivals and ceremonies by which the whole of Muria life is brought under the sway of religion, and conclude by giving detailed descriptions of festivals I have myself observed. We shall then be in a position to see more fully how the ghotul fits in to this great complex of belief and practice.

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time to time, the Siraha selects one or two for special worship and attention. The cult of the gods, therefore, moves to and fro, now illuminating a forgotten deity, now strengthening the influence of the more powerful. There is nothing fixed, definite, logical or formulated about Muria religion, for here the power of the prophet and magician is greater than that of the priest. Muria religion is thus dynamic and essentially modernist. It can always adapt itself to new conditions. There is nothing traditional or orthodox in its temper.

The Supreme Being

The Muria have a belief, which is probably very old, in a Supreme Being, whom they call variously Mahapurub, Ispural and Bhagavan. Mahapurub, which may be literally translated the 'Great East', perhaps has reference to the Sun. Bhagavan is, of course, the common Hindu name for the adorable god of Bhakti worship. Mahapurub and Bhagavan are not distinguished in Muria thought: the difference between them is linguistic, Mahapurub being used in the exclusively Halbi-speaking areas. Ispural presents more of a problem. Grigson found the word in use in a few Hill Maria villages bordering the Muria country. 'Ispural would perhaps punish evil-doers somewhere after death; but no one could say who or where Ispural was. . . It is possibly a faint echo of missionary teaching passed on by bazaar gossip.'[1] But to Koppers 'this effort at explanation is not satisfactory'. The word Ispural, he thinks, is 'genuinely Dravidian' and suggests a very old belief in a Supreme Being.[2] Like Grigson, I was unable to discover anything about Ispural, though he appears in the song given on p. 169 as one of the deities accused of having caused a man to be killed by a tiger. He is, however, acquitted of the charge and the death is ascribed to the jealousy of the Departed. But the word is known right across northern Bastar and I agree with Koppers that it probably represents an ancient element in Muria theology.

Mahapurub, to call him by what is his common name, is the creator of Nadumbhum or the Middle World. He lives in Porrobhum, or Upper World, attended by his seven daughters, the divine motiari, and from this post of vantage exercises a rather sketchy control over human affairs. He created the world, but only with the help of Lingo and Bhimul. He made mankind, but so carelessly that many people turned into witches and warlocks. It took him a long while to discover how to ensure that men and women would die and thus provide him with a sufficient supply of *jiva* or living souls. He appears to exercise no control at all on the daily life of mortals; he does men no good, but neither does he do them any harm. As a result there is not a single shrine for him throughout the Muria country. He receives no sacrifices and in ordinary thought is largely ignored. As the originator of death, however, it is supposed that when a man dies it may be at his command.

Both Bhagavan and Mahapurub appear in Muria folk-tales though I am not sure how far the picture given there is to be taken in a theological sense. Each deity has seven daughters, though we hear nothing of wives.[3] Every evening the seven daughters go in their flying chariot to visit Mahapurub and to dance before him.[4] In one tale the seven daughters get annoyed with the hero and build a dam to stop the rain falling on his fields. He climbs up a

[1] Grigson, op. cit., pp. 244*f*.
[2] W. Koppers, 'Bhagwan, the Supreme Deity of the Bhils', *Anthropos*, Tome XXXV/XXXVI (1940-1), p. 307.
[3] The Bhil, however, 'are all of one opinion that Bhagwan has no wife and no children'. Koppers, op. cit., p. 292.
[4] Verrier Elwin, *Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal* (Bombay, 1944), p. 8.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
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796 he could not keep away from motiari; he chased them round and round the field. A Siraha-medium collected a brass ring from every woman present to offer to the gods; this may have been a token of compensation for the presence of women at the festival, for in strict Muria tradition no woman should have been there.

XIII. Conclusion

771 182 This chapter has dealt with the theological and ceremonial aspects of Muria religion. This is far from being the whole story, for religion is for the Muria a very wide thing, consecrating every aspect of life, inspiring a comprehensive ethical system and linking gods and men, living and dead into a single family that even the intrusion of death cannot destroy.

Muria religion is not unlike that of other tribes—Bison-horn Maria, Raja Muria, Halba, Bhattra—in Bastar (though it has an advantage of the others in possessing a noble hero-god whose example is an inspiration), but it is very different from that of its neighbours. Its elaborate, rich and picturesque character is in striking contrast to the drab and languid faith of the Central Provinces Gond. The tribes of western Orissa near the Bastar border—Kond, Bondo, Gadaba—fully endowed as to personal culture, have a less developed and satisfying religion. The rites of the Maria of the Abujhmar and Chanda are stark and austere beside those of the Muria.

Muria religion, like Muria institutions, has probably reached the peak of its development. In its action on the Muria mind, Hinduism has had a fertilizing and energizing effect, far different from the Puritan destructiveness of its influence to the north. So long as the tribe and its institutions hold together, so long as they remain free from external interference, there is hope that this religion may continue to satisfy Muria needs and interpret Muria aspirations. Otherwise, I fear, now that the peak is reached, change will only bring decline.

Muria religion today is not without dignity and power. It has its distortions and abuses—many have been noted in the present chapter—but we must not confound the corruptions of a religion with religion itself. Even its superstitions may have their value. George Tyrrell once suggested that the superstitions of Catholicism provided 'harmless and healthy outlets for humours otherwise dangerous and morbid'.

Religion must fulfil and answer human needs. There is hardly a greater need among aboriginals than freedom from fear, and Muria ceremonial by aiming at the placation of god and ghost (the ultimate source of all fears) brings the great gift of solace. The desire for continuity is met by the elaborate funerary rites which bring the Departed home. The marriage ceremonial consecrates the Muria's passionate interest in the family. The fundamental longing for tribal unity and solidarity is expressed and strengthened by the great festivals when many villages dance together, share a common meal and unite in the worship of the gods. The gods intermarry and are related just as men are.

To the Muria, is God the rewarder of them that seek him? There is little that can be called love in the Muria's attitude to any of his gods. But there is gratitude often and sometimes a belief that a god takes a special interest in a man, furthers his cause and goes about with him. There is pride too; a powerful and important clan-god is a source of credit to a village, a fine litter of Danteshwari awakes feelings of patriotic delight. But generally the gods are feared; like the Departed they are dangerous and must be kept in their place. There is many a god who is never noticed except when he makes a nuisance of himself.

2:Elwin Es (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32 Muria

MURIA RELIGION

Morals are not usually closely linked with aboriginal theology and ritual. Muria ethics, as we see elsewhere, are fully developed and reach a lofty standard. Part of the system undoubtedly derives from Lingo who during his earthly sojourn is believed to have taught many lessons of domestic fidelity and daily conduct, and whose own life and character is not ignoble. The other gods are less highly moralized, yet their worship probably has a moral influence. For example, when they return home after dancing all night at a festival, are the chelik and motiari better boys and girls? Probably. Their social instincts have been strengthened. Their whole life—gay, colourful, united, peaceful—has appeared more than ever attractive and desirable, and they know that it can only be enjoyed by the practice of certain virtues. They have learnt, in the common dance and common meal, the futility of jealousy, greed and pride.

This fulfilment of the need for moral growth is not, of course, a conscious one; nor is the satisfaction of the sense of beauty in the dancing, music and drum rhythm at festival, marriage and funeral. But it is there and it is most important. The phallic element is not obtruded, but that too is there and its presence reassures the people that this necessary and beautiful aspect of human life is not alien to the divine interest.

A few other points may be noted. I have already stressed the absence of fixed forms and even of a defined pantheon. There is no sacred book, no canon, no deposit of faith committed to a central authorized guardian, no regular liturgy. Religion is always on the move. Even the legends change from village to village. The living voice of the prophet is more important than the convention of the priest. The dream of today is more urgent than the tradition of yesterday. The position and reputation of the gods is constantly changing. As the Muria become more State-conscious, more patriotic and nationalist, as the opening of communications brings them more in touch with the Palace and the Dassera traditions, the worship of Danteshwari is likely to grow ever stronger. By contrast I think the cult of Bara Deo will wane more and more as it has done already in the Central Provinces. Indeed in the neighbouring Bindra Nawagarh Zamindari I have recorded a legend that the decline of Bara Deo was directly due to the British occupation; the old god was captured by the British who still hold him and derive their power from him. As more and more forests are reserved the ancient jungle gods tend to disappear; Kadrengal, lord of the hunt, is already a mere shadow of his former self. There is no need for missionary effort; the advance of civilization will automatically change the character of the gods. I anticipate a considerable increase in the cult of Mahapurub and Bhagavan who are above earthly changes. Modern civilization tends to push men's aspirations and their divinities up into the sky.

The Muria attitude to the gods is a curiously ambivalent blend of familiarity and terror, of humour, affection and abuse. Often they do not so much pray to the gods as talk things over with them, usually at the top of their voices. If they are not satisfied they abuse their gods with point and wit, or treat them very casually in an attempt to bring them to their senses. I was unable to obtain many *mantra*; I believe few exist; the expressions used for the harvest on page 25 and at the time of the hunt on page 42 are definitely intercessory rather than mandatory. The idea that the priest, by virtue of his position or his abstinence, can force the gods to his will, is alien to Muria thought. Yet along with the familiarity and homeliness, there is sometimes a very real sense of awe. In some of the hill temples, when a famous medium is possessed, when the Anga moves so mysteriously to show

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
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its will, at the crises of the bull-sacrifice, at the dance of the dead, the urgent and catastrophic nature of the unseen is emphasized and the worshippers are hushed into dread and reverence.

Muria religion, then, which anticipates the vast developments of Hinduism, is not unworthy of the great religious system which has grown up on the same soil and out of the same traditions. Of that system it is of course a simple and childlike version, yet it does not lack dignity, power and beauty, and the modern Hindu—if he is wise—will treat it with the reverence that is always due to children's things.

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THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

their elders and are raised into the air with a whistle and a shout.[1] This pyramid slowly gyrates, and the other boys form a procession and march round and round singing.

Songs

1

[533]

Re reloyo re rela re rela rela re reloyo re rela rela
Sayrela re rela rela.

[539]

At the boundary the monkey sits on a pile of stones.
Get up, monkey, get up, monkey.
My horse is speaking to you, monkey.
You are sitting on a long pole, monkey.
You are eating the raw ebony fruit, monkey.

2

Whose is this temple, girl?
It is the shrine of the Kolang boys, girl.
This is their temple, girl.
Come out to see it, girl.
Bring a lamp in the left hand, girl,
Water in the right, girl.
Give them greeting, girl.
Bring rice in the fan, girl,
Rice in the basket, girl,
Rice in the leaf-cup, girl,
Bring salt in the leaf-bundle, girl.
Give us something to drink from your hand, girl.

The last dance is the Kokotar Daka Endanna. The chelik form a line, each boy holding in his right hand the stick of the one in front and in his left the stick of the one behind. They go round in a rambling line, while the boys at the end hop about and waggle like the tail of the *manda-pite* bird. Others say that the head of the line is a dog and the tail a hare; the purpose of the dance then becomes a game in which the head of the line must turn round and catch the tail. In Koilibera, the boys at the tail imitated the copulation of goats.

[771]

[1] Thurston describes a similar dance performed by Koyi women. 'The older ones stood in a circle with their arms intertwined and the younger girls perched aloft, standing astraddle on their shoulders.'—Thurston, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 72. I have seen similar dances of this kind performed by the Dhurwa-Parja of southern Bastar, the Kond of Koraput District and the Bhil of the Dangs.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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Bison Horn Maria

411 in this book, but the Maria have a fine spear used for stabbing. Bows and arrows are not unlike those in use elsewhere. The arrows are either pointed or clubbed. Pellet bows are used for killing birds, as is the *engram*, the many-pointed wooden arrow which is illustrated here. The pointed iron arrow is that employed in most of the murders by shooting or stabbing. But the *engram* was used in one or two cases.

412 Implements of domestic use include the heavy rice-husker which is so constantly in the hands of the women. With this Oyami Masa in a fit of rage battered his cousin to death at Jabeli.[1] The Bison-horn Maria hoe (*korki*) is similar to that common in the plains, and a man once used it to kill his mother in a fit of drunkenness.[2]

283 The Maria have no subsidiary industries worth the name.
286 Spinning and weaving is taboo to them, though they are allowed to spin rope from hemp and grass. They make
285 baskets of leaves and bamboo, but mostly for their own domestic use. They are expert at making mats, which they either weave with grass and reeds on a frame or plait with bamboo slats. The Maria do their own ironwork and do it
326 well, for there is a plentiful supply of excellent ore. Those
565 Maria who take to smelting and blacksmithery are regarded as inferior by the others who generally do not inter-marry or eat with them. This rule is not, however, absolute and in other ways the Maria blacksmiths live as members of the tribe, join their dances and festivals and share the common life. For statistical purposes I have included the Maria blacksmiths among the other Maria in this book.

III

● 771 The religion of the Maria centres round the Earth, the State and the Clan. The Earth is the ultimate source of life and is personified in the Village Mother. The State is represented by Danteshwari, the tutelary goddess of the royal family: she is now sometimes identified with the Earth Mother or the Village Mother, but she often has a shrine or at least an image of her own, and her cult is rapidly increasing in popularity.

771 Developing out of the cult of the earth is the worship of
776 the clan-god. The traditional theory is that every clan is
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[1] Case No 62. [2] Case No 72.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

closely connected with a certain *bhum* or clan-territory. 771
Each *bhum* has its special headquarters where there should 776
be the temple of the clan-god and the residence of the clan- 614
priest. Here members of the clan should bring some token of their Dead and come to celebrate the great clan festivals. The clan-gods are known as Anga or Pen, and are of peculiar shape and character. They consist of three parallel logs attached to one another by cross-bars and decorated with silver bands and peacock feathers, the central log being carved into the rude likeness of a snake or bird. These gods are realistically imagined. They marry and have children; they move from place to place; they have a flair for detecting witches and other criminals. I do not know of any case where the Anga was used to track down a murder, but they are often employed to discover thefts and surprise the secrets of black magic.

The Bison-horn Maria are divided into a number of 615
phratries and clans, resembling those of the Gond and other 614
tribes. Grigson recorded five phratries, the Marvi, the Kuhrami, the Sori, the Markami and the Kawasi. Each of these is connected with a totem, the Marvi with the goat in some villages and the cobra in others, the Kuhrami with the cuckoo, the Sori with the tiger and the Markami and Kawasi with the tortoise. The subordinate clans, of which there are a large number—Grigson did not record quite all of them—are divided among these phratries and are regulated by the usual rule that regards all the clans of one phratry as related to one another and, therefore, barred from inter-marriages. As I have said, each clan has its special and separate *bhum* or territory, which should be its exclusive possession. But the neat and tidy arrangements of former days have broken [177] down, and now not only are members of several different clans to be found in one village, but members of the clans are widely dispersed and it is often difficult for them even to visit their clan-god and make the proper sacrifices with the help of the clan-priest, the Waddai, or attend the special festivals for the clan-god.

The Maria year is enriched and diversified by a long series 796
of agricultural and other festivals. At the beginning of the year falls the Bhimul Pandum held in honour of the traditional rain-giver of central India. There follows a ceremony

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of a timid and resigned outlook in place of the manly spirit of old. Finally I propose to discuss the results of the more liberal policy towards the aboriginals which H.E.H. the Nizam's Government has pursued since 1944, and to outline the principles and the first stages of the Gond Education Scheme, which is designed to help the Gonds in the struggle for existence and to restore to them self-respect and pride in their own ancient culture.

In an account of a culture as rich and complex as that of the Raj Gonds the anthropologist must needs concentrate on certain aspects, and in this book I have given first place to the Gonds' mythology and their complex ritual, sanctioned and sustained in almost every phase by mythical precedents. This part of Gond culture is rapidly disintegrating and its study, still possible in the hills of Utnur and Asifabad Taluqs, would come too late in the more open parts of the District. Problems of psychology and the more intimate matters of the individual's life, on the other hand, are only fleetingly touched upon, but I believe that changes in this sphere are not as rapid and the time left for their study is consequently far less limited.

Although this book is not a treatise on linguistics, Gondi texts of some length have found a place in many chapters. I noted them when collecting my material and as they are the first recorded specimens of the pecular Gondi spoken in Adilabad, I do not feel justified in withholding them from the student of Indian languages. All have been checked and rechecked with several informants, but this is no guarantee of absolute accuracy, for Gonds, like the speakers of most unwritten languages, are often careless about rules of grammar and not very sensitive to slight slips in a text read out to them. The recording, moreover, is not in accordance with the exigent demands of modern phonetics, which only the trained linguist can fulfil. Consonants are used with their values in English, and vowels with their values in Italian, long and short signs being added only where confusion might otherwise arise between two words of similar sound. Diacritical signs have been used only in the consonants ṭ, ṛ and ḥ. While the dental t, rendered by the Nagri character त , is transcribed by simple t, the cerebral t rendered in Nagri by ट, is transcribed by ṭ. Similarly the soft r, र in Nagri, is transcribed r, and the hard r, ड़ in Nagri, as ṛ. The letter ḥ stands for a sound closely resembling the German ch in Bach (pronounced like the composer). This sound occurs mainly in words of Marathi origin, and in such words most Gonds not familiar with Marathi pronounce it not as sh, but h; examples are *goḥti* (word, speech) and *paḥti* (favour) pronounced in pure Marathi as *goshti* and *pashti*; but I have transcribed these and similar words as pronounced by the Gonds in the hills.

Following the spelling of the Linguistic Survey and Trench's Grammar, I have used *w* for all *v*-sounds, except in proper names occurring in the English text, and in words borrowed from Hindi in which *v* is